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of all Forms of
Racial Discrimination

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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION
OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 9
OF THE CONVENTION

Fifteenth periodic report of States parties due in 1998

Addendum

Syrian Arab Republic*

[Original: ARABIC]
[4 February 1998]

* This document contains the twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth periodic reports due on 21 May 1992, 1994, 1996 and 1998, respectively, submitted in one document. For the ninth, tenth and eleventh periodic reports of the Syrian Arab Republic and the summary records of the meetings at which the Committee considered that report, see documents CERD/C/197/Add.6 and CERD/C/SR.932.

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1. The consolidated twelfth, thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth periodic reports of the Syrian Arab Republic are submitted in accordance with article 9, paragraph 1, of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

2. The Syrian Arab Republic was among the first States to accede to the international conventions against apartheid. It is a party not only to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination but also to the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid, the International Convention against Apartheid in Sports, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, the Slavery Conventions, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

3. Syrian society is distinguished from other societies in the world by its tolerance and lack of bigotry. This characteristic is perceived and acknowledged by any foreigner or diplomat living in the Syrian Arab Republic. The phenomenon of racial discrimination is unknown in our history and totally alien to our society in which any behaviour or act manifesting or implying racism is regarded as highly reprehensible. Accordingly, our people are engaged in a relentless battle against the manifestations of racism that characterize Israeli ideology.

4. Hence, there is no place in the Syrian Arab Republic for any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life.

5. The Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic, which was proclaimed in 1973, guarantees the basic norms of human rights. It safeguards the personal liberty of all citizens, which is regarded as a sacred right, and considers all citizens to be equal before the law in regard to their rights and obligations. It guarantees the principle of equality of opportunity and the right to participate in political, economic, social and cultural life. Women are granted every opportunity to participate fully and effectively in political, economic, social and cultural life without any restrictions that would impede their advancement or their participation in social development. The Constitution also guarantees the right to education, which is free of charge for all at all stages and compulsory at the primary stage. In addition, the Constitution safeguards freedom of belief, respects all religions, guarantees freedom to engage in religious observance and regards the subjection of all to the rule of law as a fundamental principle governing society and the State.

6. The Statutes of the Arab Baath Socialist Party, which is the leading party in the National Progressive Front in the Syrian Arab Republic, designate participation in the elimination of apartheid, of all policies and practices of racial discrimination or segregation and of racist propaganda as a cornerstone of the State's public policy. According to those Statutes, the value of citizens can be determined only after they have been granted equal

opportunities and every citizen living in Arab territory and not belonging to a racist grouping is entitled to full citizenship rights. The Statutes regard mankind as an entity with mutual interests, shared values and a joint civilization. The Arabs draw on, and also nourish, world civilization and extend the hand of friendship to other nations with which they collaborate in order to establish equitable systems that guarantee prosperity, peace and high ethical and spiritual standards for all peoples.

7. In keeping with this humanitarian spirit and this firm position based on principle, the Syrian Arab Republic has taken an unyielding stand in condemning racist regimes anywhere in the world, particularly the former apartheid regime in South Africa, and its information media are committed to diligent and constant participation in the exposure and condemnation of racist regimes throughout the world.

8. The international conventions to which the Syrian Arab Republic accedes become an integral part of its domestic legislation and are binding on the judicial and other authorities in the State. In this connection:

(a) The national socialist education syllabus of the Ministry of Education focuses on the need to combat all forms of racism and all forms of sectarianism, feudalism and international imperialism, and also emphasizes the need to ensure the triumph of right and justice, equality of opportunity, non-alignment and the protection of human rights;

(b) The religious education syllabus reviews and condemns all forms and aspects of racial discrimination, since Islam teaches that all human beings are equal in regard to their human value and their rights and obligations without any discrimination on grounds of colour, sex, race, language or religion;

(c) The Arabic language syllabus diligently combats racial discrimination through its selected poetical and narrative texts which highlight concepts and values that are compatible with human rights;

(d) The various branches of the arts syllabus seek to promote nobility of character and advancement to a high humanitarian standard of charity, truth and beauty through the graphic, vocal, lyric and dramatic arts. The subjects taught are inspired by events which have documentary value in ensuring the condemnation of racial persecution and discrimination and ethnic prejudice;

(e) The history books cover this question by studying racism and racial discrimination and their historical emergence in the East and the West, by designating the movements and regimes which were, and still are, based on racial persecution and discrimination, and by opposing all forms of persecution, injustice and racial discrimination and promoting the values of justice and equality in regard to rights and obligations;

(f) In its communiqué No. 7/1902 of 12 September 1964, the Ministry called upon all educational institutions to apply the principles enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The communiqué made provision, in particular, for the establishment of a human rights committee in every school

in order to promote a spirit of benevolence and develop an understanding of human rights and of the need to eliminate domination, exploitation and despotism, and for the annual celebration of Human Rights Day through the publication of condemnations of intolerance based on sex, religion, colour or language;

(g) The adult education and eradication of illiteracy programmes that are organized for all citizens without exception focus on the need to combat racism and discrimination.

9. The policy pursued by the Ministry of Culture focuses on racial discrimination through the books that it produces and the articles that it publishes in periodicals and magazines, through its promotion of films and tapes that help to achieve this goal and through its prohibition of the films and tapes produced by some bodies seeking to disparage certain races or communities. The Ministry also encourages art exhibitions that highlight racist practices, particularly those which Israel is pursuing against the people of Palestine and the occupied Arab territories.

10. The absence of the phenomenon of racial discrimination in the history of our society explains why the Syrian legislature has not promulgated any laws, decrees or judicial or other directives concerning this phenomenon. However, the legislature has given attention to the basic aspects referred to in article 1, paragraph 1. For example, under the terms of article 307 of the Syrian Penal Code promulgated in 1949, any act or verbal or written statement that is intended to incite, or has the result of inciting, confessional or racial bigotry or strife among the various communities and component elements of the nation is a punishable offence. Article 308 of the said Code further stipulates that it is a punishable offence for anyone to belong to an association established for the purpose referred to in article 307 above. Articles 69 and 109 of the same Code make provision for the dissolution of such associations and the confiscation of their property. Articles 462 and 463 deal with offences against religious feelings. The Constitution and laws in force in the Syrian Arab Republic guarantee the rights recognized in article 5 of the Convention to all citizens without discrimination. The right to seek legal remedy through the national tribunals and other State institutions (art. 6 of the Convention) is also guaranteed to all citizens without discrimination. In this connection, we wish to point out that there is no so-called Kurdish problem in the Syrian Arab Republic, since all citizens enjoy their full and unrestricted civic rights and obligations. The Kurds do not constitute a grouping, since they are found throughout the country and form part of the fabric of Syrian society. In fact, they hold numerous important political and administrative posts and positions in the country. The issue that has been raised erroneously concerns the Kurdish refugees who entered the Syrian Arab Republic illegally due to the persecution to which they had been subjected in neighbouring countries. With regard to citizens from the Jewish community, they have never been required to perform military service and no special restrictions have been placed on their travel outside the country. The vast majority left the country of their own accord.

11. In 1996, 351,189 Palestinians were registered with the General Agency for Palestine Arab Refugees. They retain their Palestinian identity and nationality, as well as their right to return to their country and their

homes. The Syrian Arab Republic provides them with every facility for residence and employment and issues them with special travel documents to enable them to travel abroad. Their presence is temporary until such time as their problem is solved in conformity with the relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly those concerning their right of return.

12. We wish to affirm the commitment of the Syrian Arab Republic to the provisions of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, as well as its resolute desire to cooperate with your distinguished Committee so that we can work together to ensure the full elimination of this scourge and enable peoples to live in a world free from racism, hatred and bigotry.